

Newport FD / Depoe Bay RFPD
Collaborative Agreements Committee Meeting Minutes
September 25, 2012

Co-Chairs: Chief Phil Paige, Newport FD
Chief Joshua Williams, Depoe Bay RFPD

Chief Williams called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm and thanked Committee Members and visitors for their attendance.

Review of Last Meeting – – Chief Williams

Chief Williams began by asking everyone to quickly introduce themselves and then he moved on to reviewing the last meeting which was held August 28, 2012. He stated that in the last meeting we had discussed talked about what the process is going to be and learning about each other, the study, and all of our options. This is to be open communications. The Chiefs have discussed there are no secrets and we would like this to open book communications among the chiefs, firefighters, career staff, volunteers and policymakers.

Chief Williams continued and asked if the 4th Tuesday of the month would be the best time to meet, understanding that those days do not work the best for everyone. He also asked the Group's thoughts about possibly meeting on a different day. It was discussed and thought for now, it was probably best to leave it at the 4th Tuesday of the month, due to conflicting meetings and jobs of others involved.

Chief Williams stated that we had discussed we had also discussed evaluating changes based on the value of the change, the capacity to make the change and if there was support for the change by the Board, career staff, volunteers, and the community.

Group Reports and Feedback

Chief Williams moved on to the group reports and asking for the feedback from each specific group representative and their group.

Chief Paige stated that for the group reports, everyone was asked to go back and make contact with their group and bring back the concerns or issues of each specific group. We would list the bullet point issues on a flip chart and later we can prioritize the issues that may be involved in the different options for collaboration.

We started with the volunteers and their specific issues. Rob Pratt, who was there on behalf of Newport Fire Volunteers stated that he had anticipated more of a response from the volunteers but believes the volunteers will be more reactionary and we will get more input from them once there has been input from others and there is more specific information to discuss with the volunteers about what possible changes could take effect.

Rob stated that from his perspective, communication was very important and believed that by having these open meetings and discussions that we were, in fact, doing what needed to be done. A very important part of communication is listening and that he was ready to do that as representative for the volunteers.

Eric Pena, representing Depoe Bay Fire volunteers, responded by saying that he echoed the same thing as Rob. He did not put out a formal request to his volunteers and similarly didn't get much feedback since there was not much to give feedback on. Also a lot of the DBFD volunteers are out of the district so they are learning the district and how their district runs anyway.

Rob Pratt also added where he saw it going, anticipated joint training—consolidated training, and also criticism about the training, and thinks that honest discourse is good. He is taking the silence as a positive.

Chief Paige added that communication was key and it will be a change for all of us. He added that he had a suggestion to get the email address of everyone in the group that each person represents, so that when the minutes are sent to you, as representative, you could send it to everyone in your group.

Before the career staff representatives could begin listing their issues, they had to respond to an emergency incident, and they were unable to return before the end of the meeting.

Chief Paige asked if council and board members could be grouped together as “policy makers” for this part of jotting down issues and concerns. Barbara Leff stated that there may be separate issues, but she thought that a lot of them were related and she was fine with it that way. She added that she and Gray were speaking with Chief Williams about what happens to budget management and who controls the money overall.

Jim Voetberg, representing the City of Newport, stated one of his concerns was how to articulate to the public the increased the level of service with limited funds, and how do we communicate to the community and Board of what we are doing, how we are doing it, and how we are going to have better service for the same amount of money.

Richard Beemer, Newport City Council, stated that until such time as suggestions are made and what the proposed changes may be, he has not reported back to the council, other than the fact that nothing has taken place other than just meeting. There is nothing to propose as of yet. Once proposals and suggestions are made, he stated he will report back to the Council.

Ron Beck, representing Newport Rural Fire District, stated that although they met last week, the district is unsure what their role is going to be in this. They have a service contract with the City of Newport for fire protection. They have no equipment, no buildings, and no staff. They write the city a check, they provide the services. That is the scope of the contract today, but they recognize if Depoe Bay and Newport work together and it eventually becomes a merger or consolidation, Newport Rural is the governmental body boundary between the two, so we may have to merge one way or the other.

An inter-governmental agreement on the other hand would be simple and straightforward. Is it the same service for the same or less amount of money? That is our challenge right now; for us, it is a ‘wait- and-see’ and we will follow Newport’s lead because they are our fire department.

Barbara Leff said that Newport Rural’s challenge is everyone’s challenge.

Beck continued stating that Newport Rural is geographically between the City of Newport’s city limits and the south end of Depoe Bay Rural’s area.

NRFD is that area in between, so that if there is going to be an adjustment that the voters approve – consolidate, merger, two way, three way, whatever it may be—how do we get that point across? Some of it may be educating them as to how it is done today.

Paige added that some of this would depend on not only the taxing structure, but the governmental structure as well.

Beck agreed and stated that as we have heard in the report, it is not a mutual aid intergovernmental agreement, and there are those which are mergers and consolidations. We need to know where the best benefit to the taxpayers manifest themselves and probably support that. So we are in the 'wait-and-see' phase. We see it as a challenge but one worth undertaking.

It was also discussed that these meetings are helping to accomplish just that. Whether it is Newport or Depoe Bay, we all have valued employees whether they are career or volunteer. We want to make sure that our critical volunteers and staff feel their part in the system. We want to embrace what they are trying to do and recognize that there are going to be some that just love it and some that just hate it. The most important part is that we have both career and volunteer buy-in.

Chief Paige added that we need to know the lines of authority and how does the structure fit together organizationally, not only governmentally. Organizational relationships are important and something we will need to know.

Beck asked if at the present time there were any collaborative agreements in place. Paige responded that there was at least one. Rob Murphy asked if there were any sort of contracts. Gray answered that this would factor in somewhere.

Other concerns stated were that services we currently provide to the citizens should not diminish.

Gray Snipes brought up that the standardization matter. We need to be on the same page regarding standardized policies and procedures.

Chief Williams stated that we all have different policies and procedures, but the fact is that we all really follow a national standard when it comes to operations. Whether you're fighting a car fire in Newport or Depoe Bay it does not make a difference. The operations needed are the same.

Paige noted that maintaining good relations between management, labor and volunteers are important.

Leff pointed out that relations between union career staff and non-union career staff are important, too.

Asst. Chief Walling added that he had written down on his list, the benefits and downfalls of the operational deployment and how will it affect each of the districts; how will it factor in? Staffing, emergency response and meeting the standard of cover.

Leff pointed out the situation that just happened with the emergency call that came in (rope rescue team activation). Who would respond? How would we decide and how would that be handled?

Murphy commented on apparatus response; and that NFD has a lot of trucks, where do you keep them?

Paige noted that we do not have our standard of cover finished yet and knows that DBFD does have theirs finished, but whatever changes we are looking at, we should also be going back and looking at it and deciding whether this is a positive change – improving our service – or not .

Asst. Chief Walling continued on saying that Standard of Cover did tie in with the benefits. Also the other thing to think about is not just our citizens but internal personnel. Internally, how will our employees react? Internal personnel issues are important.

Leff pointed out that we could not move forward with everything at once, so what happens if one change has an impact on other areas - for example, a change in training may be affected by personnel policies that are different.

Williams interjected that it may be 'order of implementation.' A matter of prioritization.

Paige commented that if we were looking at just administration consolidation, some of these may be big issues and some might be smaller. However, if we were looking at operational consolidation where people were interchangeable between stations, that would be something which is going to open up a lot of issues.

Chief Williams continued and stated that a big part of this whole thing is that all of us are going to have to let go of our egos. He stated he'd like to wrap this whole thing up by saying we've had discussions with other departments and it is a big obstacle to overcome. He thinks Fire Chiefs by nature are egotistical because they like to be in charge and do things. Each organization is proud of their organization and there is nothing wrong with that, but at some point, we are each going to have to let that go a little bit and have a little bit of give and take.

Murphy stated that he had two things to add. One is related to the organizational structure. Things that have to be done in order for the district or department to function. Support services that have to be done all of the time. Who will do that? What policy do we use? The second question is that NFD adopts the fire code by ordinance and that is how he enforces the fire code. How would that apply under consolidation? Newport Rural has a contract with the city specifically – but he does not have any enforcement authority outside of the city limits. How would that apply to Depoe Bay? How do you get the authority? Inspections and enforcement, how do we work that out?

Paige commented that ESCI did their study and came up with various recommendations and ideas on how to consolidate and we asked them to go back and look at what type of things might be options specifically for DBFD, NRRFD and NFD if we wanted to collaborate. Currently there are two districts and City of Newport and right now 5 stations, potentially 6 with a population of 15-16,000 and roughly 46 square miles.

We did get a rough draft back from them, and they came up with 5 options. They will give us more detail on each. Paige distributed a short summary of the first part of the draft report.

Option 1 is to look at administrative consolidation – basically, where our overhead is combined in some way. Rather than 2 chiefs, 2 assistant chiefs, we could make a better use maybe through specialization and

redefine some roles. Be more effective, not save a lot of money but be better.

Option 2 is a functional consolidation where we get in to more programs. Training, logistics, supplies, that sort of thing. Either of those first two could be a step toward option 3, where you are getting into emergency response, staffing and volunteers. Option 4 is a merger or full consolidation that would form one governmental entity; and, Option 5 would be an intergovernmental agreement which we would need to develop.

Chief Paige went on to explain that he and Chief Williams went down to Lane County Fire Authority earlier in the day, which was formed July 1. They still have two legal fire districts with their own boards, employees and budgets, but they have a fire authority which is a new entity made up of representatives of each of the governing boards of the districts and then they have an agreement which says what the functions of the fire authority are a separate FA budget. This would be an example of option 5.

Option 1 or 2 would be easier to do if you were considering one of the other options later; or if you decided the other options were too difficult to do, option 1 or 2 might get you some of the benefits without some of the headaches.

Leff suggested that we look at these options with our groups and get ideas and feedback from them on this. Paige offered to send the draft out with the minutes.

Beck stated that in looking quickly at option 4 and 5 he could see some pros and cons. He stated that in looking at Option 4 regarding Merger, the first line stating city of Newport to first annex into Newport Rural or Depoe Bay and he is assuming by that, that City of Newport no longer provides fire services and that fire employees are no longer, which means that the City of Newport collective bargaining agreement ceases to exist.

Paige stated that he believed you could do it either way. Another option in would be to annex into them with a contract back to the City to provide the services.

Beck stated that we would have to do something along that line. It occurred to him that if Newport Rural and Depoe Bay merged then you

have 2 rural districts transitioning into the city. I think there is a couple of ways to do that.

Also, the difference between a merger and consolidation is that in a consolidation a new district is formed and you can set the taxation structure at the election, but in a merger you adopt the surviving entities structure. He stated he would be interested to get that feedback from career and volunteers. Those are just a couple things he noticed.

Paige submitted that we come back next month after exploring what are the big issues and what are smaller issues with each option, and try to summarize in a matrix.

Option 4 was discussed a bit more with different scenarios that it could go.

Paige continued that 1 and 2 were a little easier to grab hold of.

Chief Williams added that he was looking more toward a goal. Say, for instance, options 3 and 4 would be more of a goal that is quite a ways away. Those need elections and they are fairly intense. It is certainly something we could get to, but he was looking at option number 1 as the first step to NFD and DBFD. We don't need two fire chiefs. We don't need two assistant chiefs. Again, he stated this was coming from him and not his board of directors.

At that level we could get the administration set and everything else would fall in to place. Chief Williams thought that once we get that in place, soon afterward the functional part of it would start to happen and fall in. The benefit of doing this, one fire chief wouldn't be the fire chief anymore, but that means that he can drop into a different position.

Maybe we could have a training officer who would do nothing but really good training, a fire marshal who is a really good fire marshal because they don't have to worry about anything else but doing inspections and the like.

Leff stated that she thought starting slowly gives us time to explain to the public and to the community what we are doing at a very clear level and maybe do a story on that and then maybe three months later do another story of the position that the second chief is now doing and hopefully how

well it is working out. The point is, going more slowly gets you time to educate the public and find out where their level of comfort is.

Paige added that options 1 and 2 give you a lot of flexibility. Options 4 and 5 gives you elections and tax structures, etc. and a lot more to do without being flexible. We have other organizations in the area that may be interested in joining and it may add value for them too. Chief Paige likes the flexibility of 1 and 2.

Beck and Paige spoke about the big picture and other people being involved.

There was more discussion that the starting point should be at the administrative level.

Chief Williams said he would like to see everyone take the draft back to their groups and see what the feedback was, especially on options 1 and 2. Option 1 was something he would really like to see comments on.

Pratt mentioned he liked the thought of administration being the first step. He thought the volunteers had concerns about that and he thought he would get comments from them on this.

Paige mentioned that the draft we were looking at and talking with Don Bivins about, that there were still corrections needed, but our information is being updated with current year budget information. Our budget was changed a bit, and in the last one they didn't include our reserve budget, so there is a different balance between the departments and the three entities. It would be helpful if they were to send Don out to our next meeting – and hopefully not charge us much for that – so everyone could ask him questions about the final report.

It was confirmed that we could be reassigning duties in the administration, but we would not be reducing staff. We would just be moving people in to other positions so there would not be duplication of duties. We would not be reducing or getting rid of any staff members or any volunteers. There is the fear of some that things would be changing in to an all career staff or an all volunteer staff. That is not what we would be doing here.

Paige agreed and stated that a lot of people are saying ‘tell us where we are going, show us what the plan is.’ And a lot of people are saying ‘there is a plan here, and we want to be involved in it.’ So the thought is to take it slow enough to have everyone involved, and hopefully still be able to click off decision points along the way, so we can go on to the next decision to be made.

Pratt said he wanted to add that he thinks a lot of times people think even though we ask them their opinion, they believe the decision has already been made. Pratt wanted to know the best way to deal with that.

Leff responded to try and bring them to the meeting to see this process.

Williams remarked that he looks at this process, which is similar to the process they went through when they developed the shift program. It was a big shift for this district. This program was built from the ground up. Not from the top down. And this is how this needs to be built. And it needs to be known that we are developing this with this group. There are going to have to be decisions made by the policy holders whether or not the chiefs like it. Each group is going to have to make some decisions to make sure we all get that input.

Chief Williams stated that he has created a blog and when we send out the minutes, etc., everyone will all get a link to this blog and you can get on there and ask questions. This will be another way to try and keep communications open.

Paige also stated that communication is important – and sometimes tough within our own organization – so the more we can participate, the more ways there are to communicate, the better off we are. Some people are comfortable talking to only certain people, some others are comfortable communicating in other ways. The more ways we have and more ways to intermingle the better off we are.

Chief Williams asked if everyone was clear on what we wanted to do for the next meeting. Talk with your groups, get feedback and we will get ready for the next meeting.

The next meeting will be October 30, 2012 at 6:00 at the Newport City Hall in the Council Chambers.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:15 pm.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Melanie Nelson, Administrative Assistant – Newport Fire Department

Chief Phil Paige

Date

Chief Joshua Williams

Date

Issues and Concerns

Volunteers:

- Difficulty of Change
- Communication
- Education/Perceptions

Career staff:

- What are the operational benefits?
- What would the operational chart look like?
- Who would fill the positions? What process would be used to decide who would fill the positions?
- Job security for paid staff
- Where would administration be located?

Policy Makers:

- Budget Management
- Better service for less or equal funds
- Taxing Structure?
- Election(s) Required?
- Employee/Volunteer Involvement/ Buy-in

Administration

- Organizational Structure/Relationships
- Authority
- Better Service for the same amount of money.
- Standardized Policies/Processes
- Relations (Labor/volunteer/management)
- Deployment/Response (S.O.C.)
- Personnel Issues
- Egos/ Identities (organizations and individuals)
- Support Services/Functions